

Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) exposure in children under 5 years of age

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For the year 2000, data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), estimates that approximately 357,483 Louisiana children under the age of 18 years were exposed to Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) inside their homes. As shown in *Figure 1* 30.4 % of adults in Louisiana reported living in a household in which at least 1 child under the age of 5 years was exposed to ETS inside the house as compared to a median of 15% for the US. This translates into 91,000 children under 5 years of age living in 180,000 households in Louisiana who were exposed to ETS.

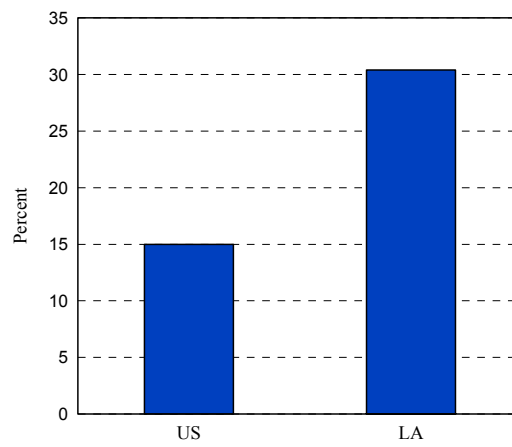
According to 1999 (Louisiana Pregnancy Risk Assessment System) LaPRAMS data (*Courtesy: Louisiana LaPRAMS Working Group*), 11% of the newborns were exposed to tobacco smoke and of the infants who were exposed, the average time of exposure was 5.5 hours per day. Results from the same survey show that one in five mothers (19%) of newborns reported that they smoked cigarettes during the 3-6 months after delivery. Higher rates were observed for White women, women with less than high school level of education, women on Medicaid, unmarried women and also in women under the age of 20 years.

Children less than 5 years of age spend most of their time at home. Therefore, the most significant source of exposure to ETS for children is at home. Several studies have shown the harmful effect of environmental tobacco smoke exposure in children. According to the EPA, ETS is classified as a Group A carcinogen and can cause lung cancer in cases with prolonged exposure. Children exposed to ETS are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome, acute lower respiratory tract infections, asthma induction and exacerbation, and middle-ear effusions.

Smoke-free environments are the most effective method for reducing ETS exposure among children as ventilation systems cannot filter and circulate air to eliminate secondhand smoke. Blowing smoke away from children, going into another room to smoke, or opening a window is ineffective in totally protecting children from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

The Louisiana Office of Public Health's Tobacco Control Program is addressing ETS exposure in the home through implementing a statewide home-based ETS media campaign. The Tobacco Control Program also conducts tobacco-free school policy presentations across the state, using the regional & state PTA meetings as a venue. For further information about ETS and Tobacco Prevention, contact Ms. Dianne Hargrove-Roberson, Program Manager, LA Tobacco Control Program at (504) 568-7210.

Title for Figure I: Percentage of adults who lived in households where at least 1 child under the age of 5 years was exposed to ETS. BRFSS 2000



Subtitles: *US Rates are Median